

Gulf of Maine Coastal Program



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Maine Coastal Nesting Islands:

identifying, protecting and restoring important habitat

Maine's coastal islands provide a rich tapestry of habitats harboring a unique assemblage of wildlife. Maine islands represent the only breeding sites in the United States for Atlantic puffins and razorbills. With the possible exception of a few islands south of the state, Maine islands provide black guillemots, Leach's storm petrels and common eiders their southernmost breeding territories. Some islands also support rare birds such as bald eagles, peregrine falcons and roseate terns. Many islands and their associated mudflats are used for feeding and resting by Atlantic brant and large numbers of migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. Islands also provide important habitat for neotropical migratory birds.

While some Maine islands provide vital habitat for birds, islands are also fragile. Today, as development spreads along the eastern seaboard, islands are attracting increased attention from potential users. Disturbances associated with second home developments and subdivisions, timber harvesting, recreational use and aquaculture ventures are increasing, and sometimes threaten critical wildlife habitat.

The Maine Coastal Islands Project -- a partnership effort sponsored by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Gulf of Maine Program and Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge), Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, The Nature Conservancy (Maine Chapter), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Maine State Planning Office's Coastal Program and Land for Maine's Future Program, local land trusts and National Audubon Society -- was established to identify and protect significant habitat on Maine's coastal nesting islands. Gulf of Maine Program biologists analyzed existing data on nesting seabirds, wading birds and endangered species for Maine's 3,500 coastal islands and ledges. Birds currently nest on about 650 islands. Of those, about 300 provide nationally significant nesting habitat. Federal and state agencies, private organizations and individuals already permanently protect nesting birds on approximately half of the nationally significant islands. The Maine Coastal Islands Project is exploring habitat protection strategies for the remaining nationally significant islands by working in partnership with landowners to promote voluntary conservation of wildlife habitat.

Land protection strategies, including private stewardship, conservation easements, technical assistance in applying for funding, resource management recommendations and actions, and acquisition by conservation organizations (on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis only) are all playing an important role in this habitat protection effort. In the last several years, 44 important nesting islands have been acquired by conservation organizations, including Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and land trusts. However, to protect the birds, more is sometimes needed than permanent conservation ownership. Seabird restoration projects, coordinated through the Gulf of Maine Seabird Working Group and supported by Gulf of Maine Program and many other partners, continue to play

a vital role in managing more than a dozen important islands to restore and maintain a diverse assemblage of seabirds on the Maine coast.

